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ABSTRACT

The Migrant Education Program (MEP) and the Migrant Head Start (MHS) program have served millions of migrant children, but little is known about program outcomes. The Government Accounting Office examined: (1) MEP and MHS goals, operations, clients, and services; (2) coordination of MEP and MHS services within and between programs by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); and (3) how well Education and HHS determine whether program goals are achieved. Data collection included a review of statutes, regulations, departmental performance plans, and other relevant documents, and interviews and observations at local program sites in eight states. Major findings were: (1) migrant workers are diverse, young, and mobile; (2) mobility and work patterns are changing; (3) MEP and MHS differ in goals and objectives, operations, eligible populations, and services; (4) MEP assists state and local efforts to meet migrant children's needs; (5) MHS provides comprehensive services to migrant infants and preschool children; (6) information exchange is limited despite need; (7) the absence of nationally accessible MEP and MHS information systems has negative effects on children; (8) federal leadership is needed to improve information exchange; (9) states and local agencies play the key role in coordinating service delivery; and (10) evaluation mechanisms are limited, with data collection focused on inputs and outputs. Recommendations are offered. Appendices include data on services and students in the eight states studied, four types of education information exchange, information sources and studies on MEP and MHS, and comments from the Departments. (SV)

United States General Accounting Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

GAO

ED 435 520

October 1999

MIGRANT CHILDREN

Education and HHS
Need to Improve the
Exchange of
Participant Information



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GAO/HEHS-00-4

RC 022138

Health, Education, and
Human Services Division

B-281918

October 15, 1999

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform and Oversight
House of Representatives

The Honorable Tom Lantos
The Honorable Bernard Sanders
House of Representatives

Children in migrant agricultural worker families often face significant developmental and educational obstacles, including poverty, limited English proficiency, rural and social isolation, and health risks associated with intermittent medical care and pesticide exposure. For migrant children, these obstacles are compounded by mobility as families move from site to site in search of work. In recognition of the needs of these children, the Congress created the Department of Education's Migrant Education Program (MEP) in 1965 and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Migrant Head Start (MHS) program in 1969.¹ In fiscal year 1999, about \$350 million was appropriated for MEP and approximately \$174 million was appropriated for MHS.

For more than 30 years, these programs have served millions of migrant children. In 1998, about 660,000 children received services from MEP and MHS. Yet very little is known about program outcomes. In this context, you asked us to ascertain (1) the goals of the MEP and MHS programs, how they operate, who they serve, and what services they provide; (2) the extent to which Education and HHS facilitate the coordination of MEP and MHS services within each of their programs and between the two programs; and (3) how well Education and HHS determine whether MEP and MHS achieve their goals and objectives.

To answer these questions, we reviewed the statutes, regulations, and other relevant documents, including the departments' strategic and performance plans as required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (the Results Act). We also interviewed program officials at the federal level and in eight states—California, Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas. We selected these states because (1) large numbers of migrant families live in

¹Although MEP was not statutorily created until after 1965, the Congress first authorized migrant education funding in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

them or travel to them for work, (2) they have both MEP and MHS programs, (3) they offer a wide range of agricultural jobs, and (4) they are located in different U.S. agricultural regions. During our site visits, we observed local programs in each of the eight states. We conducted our work from October 1998 through September 1999 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

MEP and MHS were created to provide assistance to migrant children by providing a wide spectrum of health, educational, nutritional, and social services. However, the programs' goals are quite different. MEP's major goal is to ensure that migrant children have the opportunity to meet the same state educational standards as other children, a goal geared to the needs of elementary and secondary school students who constitute about 82 percent of its participants. To achieve this goal, MEP supplements elementary and secondary education activities by, for example, providing funds for tutoring and gives the states broad discretion regarding how to use funds to achieve program goals. MEP serves children of workers engaged in crop and a variety of other agricultural activities. MEP services vary across states, districts, and schools and are provided in accordance with state and district standards. In contrast, MHS's primary goal—to promote school readiness—reflects the needs of the preschool children it serves. To achieve this goal, MHS provides funds to grantees to establish infant and preschool centers that provide comprehensive and uniform services for eligible migrant infants and preschool children of crop workers only. MHS provides prescribed health, nutritional, social, and educational services according to federal standards. As a result of MHS's narrower eligibility requirements, fewer infants and preschool migrant children are eligible for MHS than for MEP.

Neither Education nor HHS has a system to transfer participant information between different locations within each program, despite the need to transfer key information in a timely way as students move around the country. As a result, students may experience inappropriate classroom placements or delays in receiving services, repeat immunizations, or fail to complete high school graduation requirements. Although some states and grantees have designed their own systems to track students who move within their boundaries, none supports student information exchange on a national level. During our site visits, some officials said that federal leadership is needed to develop two national systems—one for MEP and one for MHS—that could support the exchange of essential student information on a national level and that could also help increase

coordination between migrant student service providers at the state and local levels.

Although both Education and HHS have collected substantial data for MEP and MHS such as numbers of participants and services, the current data do not enable either department to evaluate program outcomes and determine the extent to which program goals are met. This is partly because of fundamental measurement problems associated with collecting outcome data for these programs. Such problems include the difficulty of linking student outcomes with program interventions provided at early ages. As noted in the performance plans required by the Results Act, both Education and HHS intend to expand their data collection efforts to include some outcome data in the future. However, the usefulness of these data to describe MEP and MHS outcomes on a national level is likely to be limited because, for example, MEP data will not be comparable across states. We are recommending that Education and HHS take steps designed to improve delivery of services to migrant children under MEP and MHS and to enable the assessment of their outcomes.

Background

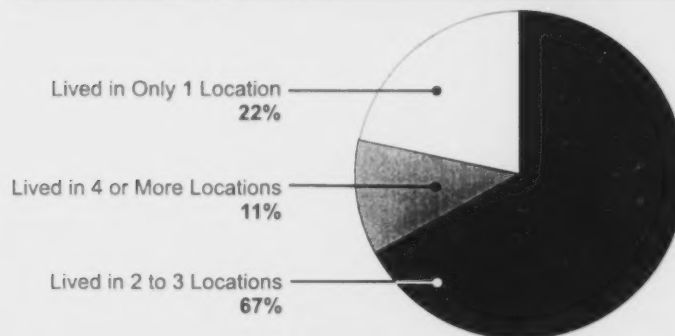
The fresh produce and the wide variety of canned and frozen foods found on U.S. tables would not be available without the work of the diverse and changing population of migrant farmworkers. Despite the importance of migrant workers in agriculture and despite national concerns over the living conditions of many migrant families, reliable data that describe this population are limited. Government data describing the number and characteristics of migrant agricultural workers vary widely, depending on how migrancy is defined, the types of jobs that are considered agricultural, and how and when data are collected. However, data indicate that 3 to 5 million farmworkers and family members travel in search of farm work annually. To understand the needs of migrant children, how they have changed over time, and the implications for service eligibility and service availability, it is important to understand the nature of the population itself and how mobility and work patterns change as the economy changes.

Migrant Workers Are Diverse, Young, and Mobile

The migrant agricultural population is diverse. Although most crop workers are Mexican and Mexican-American, there has been an influx of workers from Central America. At the same time, the migrant labor force continues to include English-speaking, white U.S. families picking blueberries in Maine; women bikers (motorcyclists) picking fruit in Idaho; Bengali-speaking workers harvesting grapes and other fruit in California;

Russian-speaking workers fishing and logging in the Northwest; and Gullah-speaking, African-American families shrimping in Georgia. Over the years, the workforce has gotten younger: Most workers are younger than 35. In particular, the number of teenage boys, some as young as 13, who migrate without families has continued to increase. Despite this increase, about half of all migrant workers travel with their families. As figure 1 shows, 67 percent of migrant crop worker families lived in two or three locations per year, about 22 percent lived in only one location, and 11 percent lived in four or more locations in 1993-94.

Figure 1: Number of Locations in Which Crop Worker Families Lived During 1993-94

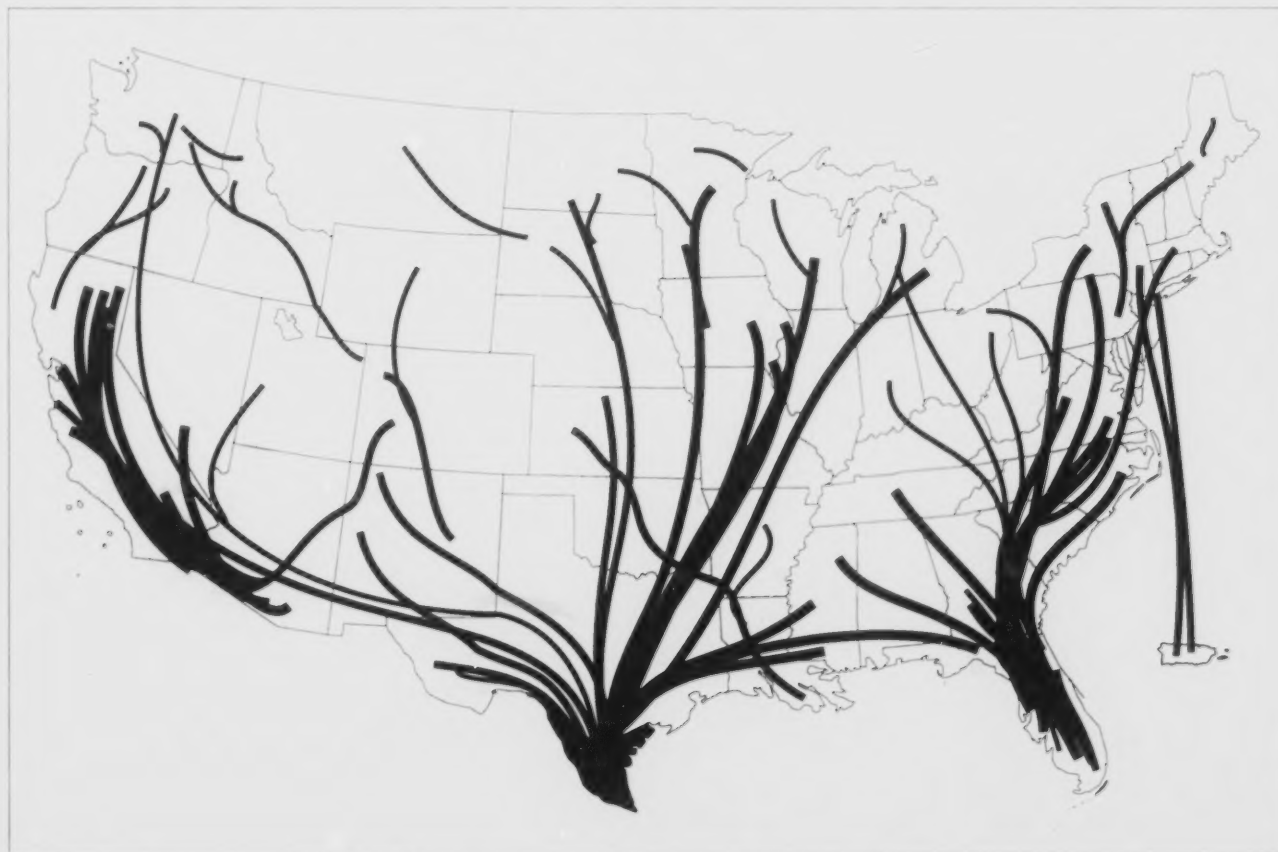


Source: National Agricultural Worker Survey of MHS parents.

Mobility and Work Patterns Are Changing

Traditionally, migratory workers have traveled in three geographical streams, or routes, but these streams have given way to less predictable movement patterns. The traditional routes that migrant families traveled followed the growth cycles of crops across specific regions of the United States, generally from south to north and back again. (See fig. 2.) The western stream was the path followed by migrant families from California to the Northwest and the western states. The central stream was the path from Texas through the Central Plains states. The eastern stream was the path followed from Florida through the East Coast states.

Figure 2: Traditional Streams of Migration



Source: GAO analysis of data from Joseph O. Prewitt Diaz, Robert T. Trottie II, and Vidal A. Rivera, Jr., *The Effects of Migration on Children: An Ethnographic Study* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Migrant Education, 1989).

Migration patterns have been changing since the 1980s. Many families no longer follow crops but travel from their home base directly to one destination, where they work for a season and then return home, while others follow unpredictable routes as they move between crop and other types of agricultural work. For example, during the 1997-98 school year,

children attending school in one district in Texas had traveled from their home base, attended schools in at least 40 other states, and then returned home. (See fig. 3.)

Figure 3: Migration Patterns of Migrant Students in One Texas School District, 1997-98



Source: Weslaco Independent School District, 1998.

Changes in migration patterns reflect the increased mechanization of agricultural work; growth of large-scale agribusiness, including poultry

and hog farming; the rotation of workers from harvest work to other types of agricultural work; and increased opportunities for jobs in other types of seasonal rural jobs, particularly the recreation industry. Although some agricultural areas have not benefited from the currently strong economy, many areas have increased in their opportunities for service-sector employment such as work in resorts. This, in turn, has enabled some migrant workers to find year-round work in a particular area, although they might continue to change jobs seasonally.

Under traditional migration patterns, the states could be classified as "home-based" and receiving states. Home-based states are those where many migrant families live for all or most of the year, depending on whether they migrate within one state or between states, respectively. Receiving states are those in which most migrants work for a few weeks or months per year and then return home. However, this distinction is becoming increasingly blurred as migration patterns change and some children stop migrating. For example, since California provides good-quality housing to some families, the children do not travel but stay at home with their mother or another relative while one or both parents continue to migrate.

MEP and MHS Differ in Goals and Objectives, Operations, Eligible Populations, and Services

Both MEP and MHS were created to provide assistance to children of migrant farmworkers. However, these programs differ in terms of goals and objectives, operations, eligible populations, and services.

MEP is one of many education programs that is intended to make sure that "Special populations receive appropriate services and assessments consistent with high standards" under the goal of building "a solid foundation for learning for all children" in Education's strategic plan.² Although the statute mentions many goals, MEP officials define MEP's overall goal as ensuring that migrant students have the opportunity to meet the same state educational standards as other children. To reach its program goal, MEP distributes funds to the states and gives them substantial discretion in reallocating resources to local and regional agencies, determining program characteristics, or delegating program decisions to local or regional agencies. Children up to age 21 who work or whose parents work in a wide range of agricultural occupations and who have moved across school district lines during the past 3 years are eligible to receive MEP services, but not all eligible children are served. States and localities determine which eligible children receive MEP services. Services

²U.S. Department of Education, 1998-2000 Strategic Plan (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 1997).

vary across states and across local districts within states, but most services are school-based.

In contrast, MHS's primary goal is the same as that of regular Head Start—to promote school readiness. To reach this overall goal, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) performance plan specifies three performance goals: enhancing children's growth and development, strengthening families, and providing children with educational services.³ MHS does this by providing grants to establish and support preschool programs separate from regular Head Start programs that provide comprehensive services and that operate under uniform federal Head Start standards. MHS targets only children of migrant crop workers who meet MHS's mobility and income requirements. As a result of MHS's narrower definition of agricultural work, fewer migrant children are eligible for MHS than for MEP. Even for this smaller population, MHS's capacity to serve all eligible children is limited. Table 1 summarizes the goals, operations, eligibility requirements, and services for MEP and MHS.

³ACF, Annual Performance Plan, FY 2000, and Revised FY 1999 Performance Plan for the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 1999).

Table 1: Key MEP and MHS Goals and Objectives, Operations, Eligibility Requirements, and Services

Program	Statutory goals and objectives	Operations	Eligibility requirements	Services
MEP	•To support high-quality educational programs for migrant children •To ensure that migrant children are provided with appropriate services such as social services, reading instruction, and emergency medical and dental services •To ensure that migrant children have the same opportunity to meet the challenging state content and performance standards that all children are expected to meet •To design programs to help migrant children overcome factors that inhibit their ability to do well in school and to prepare them to move successfully to postsecondary education or employment •To ensure that migrant children benefit from state and local systemic education reforms	•Funding level is set by the Congress •Each state is entitled to receive funds according to a statutory formula •States determine priorities for use of funds •States determine the amount of subgrants that are awarded to operating agencies •States determine the discretion allowed local education agencies regarding use of MEP funds •Programs may be run by state education agencies, local education agencies, or other entities	•0-21 years of age •Moved from one school district to another within the prior 36 months^a •Qualifying agricultural work of students or parents includes cultivating and harvesting crops and trees, logging, dairy, fisheries, meat processing, and canning •Qualifying work provides a principal means of income •No income level requirements	•Priority for services is given to migrant children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the state's challenging content and performance standards and whose education has been interrupted during the regular school year •Services are determined by state and local education agencies •Services typically support other educational services •Local education agencies may use funds in combination with other federal, state, and local funds to support schoolwide programs to upgrade the entire school program

(continued)

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Program	Statutory goals and objectives	Operations	Eligibility requirements	Services
MHS	To promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of low-income children through the provision, to low-income children and their families, of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined to be necessary, given family needs assessments	•The Secretary of HHS determines the funding level by designating funds from the 13 percent of the total Head Start appropriation that is required to be reserved for special priorities •Grant periods are indefinite and grantees can be denied future funding only for cause •Funds are awarded to grantees who may operate centers in multiple states, single states, multiple counties, or a single county •Grantees can operate MHS centers themselves or delegate all or part of this responsibility to other agencies, called delegates	•0-5 years of age •Changed residence from one geographic area to another in the preceding 2-year period •At least 51 percent of family income derives from crop work activities •Income level is at or below poverty level defined by the Office of Management and Budget •Children of seasonal agricultural workers^b	•Each MHS center must have a formal process for establishing selection criteria for selecting children and families for services •HHS prescribes program standards and services •Comprehensive services are provided in the areas of socialization, health, nutrition, education, and early childhood development. The centers can provide more services but not fewer than required by federal standards •Services are provided, on average, 10.4 hours per day •Scheduled operations range from 1 month to 12 months, depending on local agricultural cycles

Note: MEP was authorized by the Improving America's School Act (P.L. 103-382) on October 20, 1994. The Head Start program, under which funds are reserved for MHS, was most recently reauthorized by the Coats Human Service Amendments of 1998 (P.L. 105-285).

^aA child who is in a state that has only one school district, such as Hawaii, and moves from one administrative area to another within that district would be considered a migrant. In Alaska, in school districts larger than 15,000 square miles, children are considered migrants if they move to a temporary residence 20 or more miles away to engage in a fishing activity.

^bChildren of seasonal agricultural workers, defined as agricultural workers engaged in seasonal activities who do not change residence, may be served as a result of the 1998 amendments, but HHS has not issued guidance regarding services for this population.

MEP Assists State and Local Efforts to Meet the Needs of Migrant Children

MEP's general goal is to support quality educational programs for migrant children by providing funds to states and school districts to serve migrant children up to age 21 who work or whose parents work in a wide range of agricultural occupations. During the 1997-98 school year, MEP provided assistance to more than 620,000 migrant children. In fiscal year 1999, MEP grants to the states amounted to about \$350 million, or an average of \$560 per participant.⁴ Because the average spending per child is relatively small, MEP generally provides supplemental instructional and supportive services,

⁴MEP's allocation formula is based on the number of eligible migrant students aged 3-21 who have been identified by the states and the per pupil expenditure for each state on a yearly basis. However, MEP may serve children aged 0-21, and not all identified children receive services.

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such as counseling and outreach activities aimed at locating and identifying eligible children and helping them and their families gain access to educational, health, nutritional, and social services.

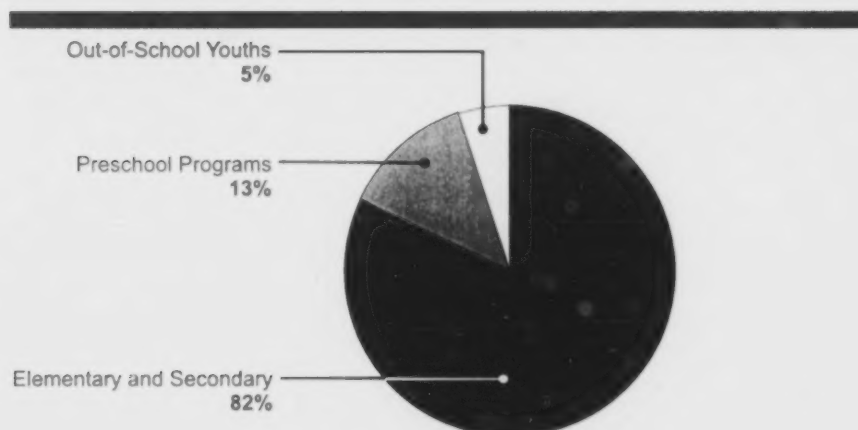
Decisions regarding how MEP funds are spent can be made largely at the state level as in New York, at the regional level as in Pennsylvania, or at the local level as in Michigan. In many of the states we visited, MEP funds that went to the state were redistributed to school districts, consortia of multiple school districts, or regional service centers with sizable migrant populations. According to the most recent available data, migrant education programs operated in about 17,000 schools, largely in rural areas, during the regular school year.⁵

MEP supports programs in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. For the regular 1997-98 school year, about 82 percent of all MEP participants were elementary and secondary school students, 13 percent were preschool children, and 5 percent were out-of-school youths. (See fig. 4.) However, each state and district decides which age groups to focus on, so the proportions differ from place to place. For example, the percentage of MEP preschool participants ranges from 41 percent of participants in Georgia to none in Rhode Island, and the percentage of MEP participants who are out-of-school youths ranges from 36 percent in Maryland to none in Wisconsin. Although MEP services are widely available, not all eligible students are served. In California, at least 25 percent of eligible students were not counted as receiving services from MEP, but the states define services differently. For example, in Colorado, all students who were identified as eligible were counted as participants because the state considered its actions to identify students as eligible as a service.⁶

⁵Data are reported from the 1997 Database of Schools Enrolling Migrant Children, which was a one-time project conducted by Education that used a list of schools and school districts from the 1993-94 Common Core of Data file.

⁶Guidance from the Department of Education states that being identified as eligible for MEP is not participation for reporting purposes. However, state and local officials told us that recruiters usually provide information or referral services when they identify children.

Figure 4: Percentages of Migrant Education Participants by Age or Grade Range, 1997-98



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education data.

A wide range of institutions deliver services. During our visits, we saw MEP services delivered by states, regional service centers, universities, districts, and local schools. Students receive services in schools, at home, or in community facilities; during the regular school year, school vacations, or in the summer; and before, during, or after the school day.

Nationwide, during the 1997-98 regular school year, MEP support services, such as social services or outreach efforts and guidance or counseling, were the most common services provided. Forty-six percent of MEP participants received social or outreach services, and 20 percent received guidance or counseling. Reading was the most common instructional service and was received by about 23 percent of MEP participants.

In the states and districts we visited, specific services also varied widely. In some cases, the needs of migrant children were met through regular school activities. In other cases, states, regions, and districts targeted MEP funds for certain services. For example, at the state level, some states designated MEP funds to pay for summer programs for migrant children and one state used MEP funds to purchase accident insurance, which enabled migrant students to take part in extracurricular activities. At the regional level, one high school was given MEP funds to hire a teacher to provide bilingual instruction in high school mathematics and science courses. At the district level, some districts used MEP funds for special

programs such as tutoring migrant children who were most at risk of failure and providing computer-based instruction or leadership training, while others used funds to support schoolwide activities. In some districts, summer services were delivered by tutors who worked with students in their homes, while in others, summer services were delivered at public schools. In many of the districts we visited, a portion of MEP funds was used for essential dental and medical services that families could not obtain otherwise. In several districts, MEP staff organized clothing drives or food banks and provided transportation to families for such things as medical appointments. (Appendixes I and II describe in more detail MEP programs and services in the eight states we visited and demographic information on the children there.)

MHS Provides Comprehensive Services to Migrant Infants and Preschool Children

To promote school readiness for migrant children, MHS funds grantees to establish and operate preschool centers that provide comprehensive services to migrant children up to age 6 whose parents cultivate and harvest crops. In 1998, MHS provided grants totaling about \$160 million to 24 grantees that served approximately 37,000 children in 33 states. Although there are no national cost figures and programs vary significantly, one MHS grantee estimated that the cost of a full-year MHS program would be as high as \$18,000 per child.

All Head Start programs are required to operate according to uniform and comprehensive federal performance standards. These standards govern key aspects of the program, such as nutrition, safety, child health and development, and family and community partnerships. After standards are met, grantees may offer additional services.

Although MHS services are comprehensive, the capacity of MHS centers to serve eligible children varies greatly. At the time of our visits, only one grantee had sufficient resources to serve all eligible children in its area, while another could serve only about 10 percent. Most MHS officials reported that the areas they served had large unmet needs for infant and toddler care in their areas. In addition, the availability of centers is limited. For example, only three MHS centers operate in Georgia.

In order to target MHS resources to the most needy children and families and to provide services in areas where needs are greatest, Head Start regulations require that all grantees and delegates set criteria that define the types of children and families who will be given priority for recruitment and selection and that they recruit children in areas that are

among those having the greatest needs as determined by formal assessments of community strengths and weakness. To reflect demographic changes in communities, community assessments have to be conducted every 3 years.

MHS programs must comply with the same performance standards as regular Head Start. However, MHS and regular Head Start differ in the ages of the children served and the seasons, hours, and days operated. As table 2 shows, these differences in characteristics reflect how MHS addresses the special needs of migrant families by providing services to younger participants and by operating longer hours and more days per week than regular Head Start.

Table 2: Differences Between Participants and Program Characteristics of MHS and Regular Head Start

Participants and program characteristics	MHS	Regular Head Start
Participants	47 percent are aged birth to 3	3 percent are aged birth to 3
Schedule	Coincides with local agricultural cycles, anywhere from 4 weeks to 12 months	September through June
Hours per day	8 to 14	4
Days per week	5 to 7	5

In the areas that we visited, MHS centers provided services that exceeded services provided by regular Head Start centers in those areas and operated for longer hours and more days per week. For example, most of these MHS centers provided transportation between homes and centers and many provided bilingual language development and education, while others instructed parents about pesticide safety and provided clothing and books to needy migrant families through community outreach efforts. (Appendix III describes the nine MHS agencies in the eight states we visited.)

MHS serves a narrowly defined agricultural population. The Head Start statute requires that eligibility for MHS be limited to children of migrant agricultural workers who have moved to seek agricultural employment during the past 2 years. In addition, families are required to have income at or below the poverty level and to derive at least 51 percent of family income from qualifying agricultural activities.⁷ Under the statute, the

⁷Although the 1998 Head Start amendments expanded coverage to include children of seasonal crop workers once the Secretary of HHS determines that services to migrants are being provided at an appropriate level, this expansion has not been implemented.

Secretary of HHS determines what agricultural activities qualify families for MHS. Since the beginning of the program in 1969, only families involved in the cultivation and harvesting of crops have been eligible for services. Moreover, 90 percent of crop workers work in fruit, vegetable, and horticultural activities and these activities are concentrated in a few states. For example, California produces one-third of all fruit, vegetable, and horticultural sales. Consequently, MHS centers are concentrated in a few states like California and Texas. In contrast, dairy, livestock, and poultry operations are widespread throughout rural areas, most operating in the Midwest, South, and East. Although these areas may have crop work as well, concentrations of eligible children are not sufficient to warrant many MHS centers in these areas.

Because MHS's regulations define agriculture narrowly, a child would be ineligible for enrollment in another MHS program if a parent found agricultural work related to dairy, hogs, or poultry.⁸ For example, a child whose family meets MHS income and mobility requirements is eligible for MHS if most of the family's income was earned by cultivating or harvesting crops. If the parents change jobs without moving, so that most of their income is earned from working on a poultry farm, and the child is able to continue in the same MHS program, the child will not be terminated from the program until it closes down or the program year is over. If the family moves to work on a chicken farm, however, and wants to use an MHS program in a different location, the child will be ineligible even though the family's income level and migrant status remain unchanged. MHS officials told us that this happens frequently.⁹ If MHS's definition were broadened to include the same population as MEP, this disruption in services would not necessarily occur. However, with more children eligible for services, grantees and delegates would have a greater need to prioritize service provision for the most needy migrant children and target funds to geographic areas where the need for services is greatest, unless more resources were devoted to MHS or to other federal or state programs.

⁸We were told that this definition might result in unanticipated negative consequences to families because it may deter some parents from accepting seasonal noncrop employment in order to maintain eligibility for MHS programs.

⁹In New York, MHS's narrow definition is not a problem. The MHS program serves children funded by MHS and by the state of New York. If a child becomes ineligible for MHS because parents change jobs from picking crops to working in a poultry plant or milking cows, the state-funded program will continue to fund services. Therefore, even if a child becomes ineligible for MHS, he or she continues to receive the same services from the state-funded program.

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Information Exchange Is Limited Despite Need

Neither Education nor HHS has done much in the past few years to coordinate the exchange of participant information between different sites of the same program as participants move from place to place. In some of the sites we visited, officials said that children sometimes did not receive needed services in a timely manner or had to repeat immunizations because records were not transferred or were not transferred promptly. Although some states and grantees have developed systems to track students, none supports information exchange on a national level. One way to address this problem is to develop national electronic information transfer systems. Officials we interviewed said that federal leadership is needed to develop such systems. In addition, we believe that federal leadership could improve state and local coordination of services although, in the sites we visited, significant interagency coordination did occur at the state and local levels.

Absence of Nationally Accessible MEP and MHS Information Systems Has Negative Effects on Children

Although migrant children move frequently from place to place, no national systems exist to support the timely transfer of student information.¹⁰ For school-aged migrant children, this often causes inappropriate classroom placements and delays in receiving services and complicates the transfer of course credits for high school students, according to MEP officials. For children eligible for MHS, MHS officials told us, this can result in duplicated services such as multiple assessments and immunizations.

While parents sometimes deliver records to the receiving school or center or can provide contact information, local officials told us that staff at the receiving school or center usually have to identify a contact point at the sending institutions to obtain student records. According to several state and local officials we visited, an electronic information tracking system that contains essential information such as a point of contact, medical information, and, in the case of MEP, grade and course placement information would enable them to promptly enroll children in appropriate courses or programs and initiate needed services.

MHS's information exchange problems continue despite the implementation of the Head Start Family Information System, a voluntary case management information system designed by Head Start to track child-specific data, including health and educational services. This information system has the potential to resolve inefficiencies resulting

¹⁰Education used to have a national system called the Migrant Student Records Transfer System. The goal of this effort was to computerize and transmit records of migrant students. Begun in 1969, it was abolished in 1994 because it was slow, incomplete, and infrequently used.

from duplication of services, particularly unneeded multiple immunizations and health screenings, but HHS needs to take several steps before the system can reach its potential. Although the system was introduced in 1990, it remains in the implementation stage, and no MHS grantee has yet fully implemented it, in part because of its voluntary nature and burdensome data entry requirements. In addition, while Head Start officials hope to use the Internet to transfer data from one MHS site to another, HHS has not yet initiated activities to ensure data confidentiality.

Some States and All MHS Grantees Have Access to Information Transfer Systems, but Their Geographic Scope Is Limited

Some states and all MHS grantees have access to information transfer systems, but systematic exchange is limited to the states or centers within each system. Although MEP lacks a national information transfer system, the states or consortia of states do have their own systems, many of which have been funded with the help of Education grants. The largest exchange system is called MIS-2000; it has 21 member states and includes such information as names and ages of the students, parent data, immunization history, high school records, and special education needs. MIS-2000 also provides unduplicated counts of students.¹¹ Another system, the New Generation System, used by 10 states, has the capability to electronically transfer students' records and provide unduplicated counts. The states have also developed their own database systems or use a commercial software package that functions as an intrastate database of student eligibility.

Similarly, some MHS grantees use information-tracking systems other than the Head Start Family Information System for transferring information across their centers, and, if a student moves between MHS centers operated by the same grantee, student information can usually be transferred quickly.¹² For example, the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project, the largest interstate grantee, which operates 86 MHS centers in 12 states, has developed a system that stores and transfers children's records without using computers. However, the MHS officials we spoke with said many migrant children move between centers operated by different grantees in such a way that timely information exchange does not occur. Therefore, disruption in service provision can occur as children wait for appropriate

¹¹Because national data currently are the result of adding together enrollment counts from each state, children are counted every time they enroll in a program in a different state. As a result, databases with unduplicated counts are valuable sources of information about the actual number of children being served.

¹²The size of areas served by the MHS grantees we visited varies substantially. One grantee operates or delegates the operation of centers in 12 states, one operates in 4 states, and five grantees operate in only 1 state.

placements and services. For example, a child who has been receiving speech and language therapy during the regular school year may need to receive it throughout the summer. If the family migrates for 6 weeks during the summer to a new location and the records do not accompany the child, the child may not receive speech therapy until he or she returns to his or her original location. Thus, the child may experience a disruption in service.

Federal Leadership Is Needed to Improve Information Exchange

Federal, state, and local educational officials agreed that Education would have to lead the effort to develop a national information tracking system for MEP. Any system that is developed would have to protect the privacy of individuals. A secure Internet system that transferred immunization and school placement information and identified a contact point at the sending school would accomplish two objectives. First, the states and local school districts could obtain a contact point for obtaining records from the schools from which migrant children came. Second, by providing an unduplicated count of migrant children, it would improve the accuracy of MEP program data. For MHS, although some officials stated that the Head Start Family Information System could provide national-level access to records, others said that its voluntary nature and voluminous data entry requirements were obstacles. Most MHS officials said that HHS leadership would be helpful in overcoming these obstacles.

Creating national electronic information tracking systems for MEP and MHS is complicated by such factors as the number and cost of existing systems that are run by consortia, private corporations, or individual states and grantees. For example, a few MHS grantees have already implemented commercial information tracking systems and are reluctant to convert to the Head Start Family Information System.

States and Local Agencies Play the Key Role in Coordinating Service Delivery

Currently, state and local agencies play the key role in coordinating services between MEP and MHS, as they do in coordinating all the other service providers used at the local level. The role of the federal agencies in coordinating services across the two programs is limited because MEP and MHS target different populations—MEP serves mainly elementary and secondary students while MHS serves preschool children—and whatever coordination may be necessary between the two programs generally occurs at the state and local levels.

In the sites we visited, coordination between MEP and MHS occurred in areas where programs overlapped, such as preparing children for kindergarten or obtaining services for families with children in both programs. For example, in an area in New York, local MEP and MHS officials coordinated efforts to prepare migrant children for kindergarten by sending MHS children to an MEP summer school and, in another area, by sending MEP staff to tutor at an MHS center. In Oregon, an MHS site shares facilities with a local MEP preschool program, and programs work together to promote school readiness. MEP and MHS officials routinely cooperate with local health agencies to provide health services for families.

Interagency coordination at the federal level could facilitate better coordination at the state and local levels. In a few locations, competition over 4- and 5-year-old migrant students and incorrect knowledge about the program hindered cooperation between local MEP and MHS staff. In these cases, federal leadership in developing complementary visions for these programs could be helpful. Education does fund some programs to help state and local coordination (see app. IV) but these efforts do not offer any systemic solutions, and many are short term and help relatively few migrant students.

In the past, interagency cooperation was largely limited to information sharing. For example, the Federal Migrant Interagency Committee, composed of representatives from 7 federal agencies, including MEP and MHS, and 20 nonfederal organizations meets routinely four times a year to share information on issues relating to migrancy.

A new interagency group, the Directors Group—formed in 1999 and composed of the directors of MEP, MHS, HHS's Migrant Health Program, and the Department of Labor's Migrant and Other Seasonally Employed Farmworker Program—holds potential for increasing interagency coordination. It has as its mission the development of consistent and complementary program visions and collaboration on initiatives that affect agricultural families. Because of its composition and mission, this group's activities could result in better program coordination.

Agencies Have Limited Mechanisms for Assessing Progress Toward Outcomes

Although state and local educational agencies collect information on various measures of students' outcomes, such as achievement test scores and promotion and graduation rates, neither Education nor HHS can assess how well the MEP or MHS programs work. This is partly because of fundamental measurement problems associated with collecting outcome data—data on the results of programs compared with their intended purposes. In response to the Results Act, both Education and HHS intend to expand data collection efforts to include some outcome data in the future.¹³

Current Data Collection Focuses on Inputs and Outputs

Although both Education and HHS collect many types of data for MEP and MHS, none of the current data enable the departments to evaluate their program outcomes. For example, since 1984, Education's data collection efforts for MEP have focused on collecting input and output information, such as percentages of students who receive particular instructional or supportive services and counts of program participants, and not information on outcomes, such as student performance.¹⁴ For some MHS goals, having the input or the output information is enough. For example, knowing that a child received an immunization is evidence enough that he or she will not get the disease or infect others with the disease. However, for other goals, including MEP's principal goal—to help students meet state educational standards—and MHS's principal goal—to promote school readiness—outcome measures are needed.

The lack of information on the results achieved by these programs is related to obstacles that hinder creating outcome measures for both MEP and MHS (see table 3). MEP's characteristics make creating outcome measures particularly challenging. For example, MEP operates as a funding stream and supports the diverse goals and objectives of many state and local activities. Thus, no single measure can be used to assess its results. In addition, MEP's relatively small dollar size, approximately \$560 per student, and its use in augmenting larger educational programs, make isolating its effects difficult. Moreover, obstacles also hinder the creation of outcome measures for MHS. For example, MHS serves many children during their infancy, although its goal—promoting school readiness—cannot be measured until 4 to 5 years later. Thus, the results of

¹³The Results Act requires agencies to develop annual performance plans to assess their progress toward reaching program goals.

¹⁴Inputs are measures of the resources a manager has available to carry out a program or activity—for example, the number of teachers or dollars available. Outputs are the amount or quality of goods, products, or services produced. Outcomes are the results achieved by a program.

the program are likely to be overshadowed by other situational factors that intervene between infancy and kindergarten.

Table 3: Obstacles to Creating Outcome Measures for Migrant Programs

Obstacle	Effect	Program
Operates like a funding stream rather than a distinct program with its own operating structure	Because the program can support efforts that address diverse goals and objectives, it is difficult to specify and select suitable outcome measures	MEP
Augments larger efforts	Program outcomes are difficult to isolate from outcomes from other federal, state, or local education programs for meeting challenging state standards	MEP
Achievement data are not comparable across states	Each state decides on its own state test, how proficiency or performance levels are set and defined, and the grades at which students are tested. Thus, student achievement scores are not comparable from state to state	MEP
Lack of flexibility	Because operations, services, and types of students served vary by state, region, district, and school, no single measure can assess outcomes	MEP
Small size	Program outcomes are difficult to isolate from outcomes deriving from other factors	MEP
Participants are mobile	Some children may be in the program only for a few weeks and there is unlikely to be measurable growth in that short time	MEP, MHS
Time lags between program interventions; for example, program intervention occurs early, often as early as infancy, but expected outcomes, such as school success, are not measured until years later	Presents measurement challenges because of multiple factors that intervene between the intervention and the measurement of outcomes	MEP, MHS
Problems with duplicate counts	A child is counted every time he or she enrolls in an MEP program. For example, if a child moves from Texas to Arkansas during the school year and is enrolled in MEP in both states, each state reports him or her. Because there is no unique national identifier for each child, aggregating state data to produce national data counts this child twice	MEP
	In MHS, children can be double counted as new participants when they move from one center to another	MHS
Services and participants served are not comparable across states	• States define "service" differently. For example, some states consider identification and recruitment or referral to another social service organization a service whereas others do not • Efforts to disaggregate data by migrant status have been problematic because migrant students are not included in statewide standardized tests if they are not enrolled in a school when tests are given, schools may waive students' participation if they are classified as having limited English proficiency or being disabled, and staff may not identify them because they dislike labeling children • States focus on serving different age groups	MEP
Program duration varies	Results of short-term programs are not likely to be measurable	MEP, MHS

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Although Education does not have outcome data for MEP, it uses several methods to obtain information on this program. Education cyclically conducts large multistate and national studies on MEP. In appendix V, we identify and briefly describe Education's major sources of information on migrant students. We also present information on the major outcome studies for U.S. school children. These outcome studies would need to be expanded to include migrant children to be useful in measuring MEP.

Education has begun several initiatives to use its standard data collection systems for collecting additional information on migrant students through its Common Core of Data and its Schools and Staffing Survey. However, these surveys do not collect outcome information. Education has not used the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the only nationally representative measure of the academic achievement of U.S. students, to obtain outcome information specifically on migrant students. NAEP, which is known as the "Nation's Report Card" because it collects data on educational outcomes for U.S. students, has been tracking student achievement on the national level since 1969. Although NAEP's testing agency may include migrant students in its random sample of participants, scores for migrant students cannot be analyzed separately because NAEP does not include representative samples of migrant students and students are not asked to identify themselves as children of migrant agricultural families. Also, schools can exclude students from participating if they do not have sufficient English proficiency, and some migrant children are likely to fall within this category. Moreover, migrant families' mobility means that students may not be in a school participating in NAEP when the test is given.

Despite the challenges in testing migrant students, such as language and mobility, experts agree that it might be feasible to design a special sample of migrant students in NAEP because migrant students are clustered in particular areas. For example, according to Education's statistics, about 281,000, or 45 percent, of migrant education participants were in California and Texas, but only 17,000, or 3 percent, were in the six New England states. In addition, many students live in their home states for most of the school year. Furthermore, NAEP tests are usually administered in the winter, when most migrant students are likely to be in their home states. In Texas, for example, most migrant students begin traveling in May and return home by October. Although information from a special sample may not be ideal, it should provide useful outcome information on MEP and allow Education to compare the academic achievement of migrant students with that of other groups of U.S. students.

The Head Start Program Information Report is HHS's annual instrument for collecting information on all Head Start programs. Although the report collects much useful demographic and service data, its data collection methods and data elements are not completely suitable to MHS's operations and population and cause data from the report to be less reliable than for regular Head Start. In addition, HHS has not ensured that all MHS grantees report these data. For the years 1996, 1997, and 1998, 27 percent, 8 percent, and 21 percent, respectively, of MHS grantees failed to report Program Information Report data. Thus, basic national information, such as the number of children served or immunizations received, is not available. In appendix VI, we briefly discuss the report and describe other sources of information on MHS.

Although HHS and other groups have conducted numerous studies to evaluate Head Start and other childcare programs, none includes outcome measures for participants in MHS.¹⁵ Appendix VI includes information about 10 national studies that included MHS children or children who share key characteristics, such as language or age, with MHS participants. Although many of these studies are likely to provide information that will be useful to HHS in evaluating the results of Head Start, none of them measures outcomes specifically for MHS.

Plans for Future Data Collection

Of the measures reported in Education's performance plan for the Results Act, only 1 of MEP's 11 performance measures is based on outcomes. It is that "increasing numbers of migrant children will meet or exceed the basic and proficient levels in state and local assessments," which will not be measured until 2001. There are questions about whether Education will be able to obtain the information by that time. For example, in the past, school staff who have had to give such information have been unwilling to identify migrant students, because they disliked labeling children and often did not know which students were migrant. Second, because the states use different tests and assess students at different times and grade levels, information will not be comparable on a national level. While intrastate comparisons can be useful for most children, they are less useful for assessing migrant children because the children are often away from their home states in the spring, when state assessments are likely to be given. Third, many states have not developed statewide assessments and are not likely to have assessments in place by 2001. Presently, 26 states

¹⁵Children and Families in an Era of Rapid Change, Head Start's Fourth National Research Conference (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health and Human Services, July 12-18, 1998), and Current Head Start and Related Research (McLean, Va.: Ellsworth Associates, n.d.) identify and describe major Head Start and childcare studies.

have received waivers from Education that allow them additional time to develop assessment systems.

HHS is implementing two major efforts to obtain additional information for regular Head Start program participants. First, HHS is revising its monitoring instrument to include outcome-based information. However, monitoring occurs in 3-year cycles during which its emphasis shifts. Second, a national study, the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), is being implemented to collect data on program results.¹⁶ Although FACES provides outcome data for regular Head Start, its findings do not apply to the MHS population because MHS participants were excluded from the study. HHS officials told us that MHS was not included in FACES because MHS and Head Start differ in duration and serve different ages, but, most importantly, the MHS children are very mobile and harder to track during a longitudinal study. However, it might be possible to get good information on children in the majority of MHS centers by concentrating on the MHS populations in states like California and Texas, where children attend centers for 9 to 10 months a year.

Conclusions

MEP and MHS have served many children. Although both programs serve preschool children, MHS serves a narrower population than MEP because MHS program regulations define agricultural work more narrowly. The narrower definition results in service gaps for some preschool children and for children of different ages in the same family, although their family income level, mobility patterns, and working conditions are the same. If MHS's definition of migrant work were broadened, MEP and MHS could work together to provide more orderly transitions for children as they move from MHS into school and, in areas where MEP does not provide preschool services but MHS does, all the children in a family could be served—the older children by MEP and younger children by MHS. However, broadening MHS's definition would increase the number of children who would be eligible for MHS services. As a result, HHS would need to analyze the adequacy and targeting of MHS's resources.

While coordination between MEP and MHS has been limited in the past, the Directors Group may help remedy this. The more significant coordination problem involves tracking participants as they move from one program site to another site of the same program. Because MEP serves mainly school-aged children and MHS serves only infants and preschool children,

¹⁶Head Start's FACES is a longitudinal study that uses a nationally representative sample of Head Start classes and collects extensive information about the quality of Head Start educational services.

children face service disruptions mostly when they move between different sites of the same program rather than when they move from one program to another. Disruptions are compounded when receiving schools or centers do not have children's records or information about whom to contact to obtain the records. Education and HHS could minimize these problems by developing nationwide systems that transmit essential information across state or grantee jurisdictions so that children can receive needed services while complete records are being sent or faxed.

One approach to setting up such systems would be to use Internet and encryption technology to allow the speedy and confidential communication of basic information, such as immunization records, special education needs, and, in the case of high school students, information on credits and courses needed for graduation. For example, Education and HHS could examine current interstate and intrastate electronic information transfer systems and, building on best practices, facilitate the development of a system that would link states and grantees without imposing extensive data entry burdens or duplicating the efforts of some states and grantees who have invested in developing and operating electronic recordkeeping systems. In addition, building on existing systems could help keep costs down while improving services to children.

Although Education and HHS collect substantial data on MEP and MHS, the departments have little information on the outcomes of these programs. Both the statutes and performance plans lay out goals for gathering outcome information, but neither Education nor HHS has conducted outcome studies that measure how well MEP and MHS are achieving these goals. We realize that implementing outcome studies is difficult and that the cost of studies that include nationally representative samples of migrant children might be prohibitive. However, the majority of MEP and MHS participants are located in a small number of states—for example, 45 percent of MEP participants are located in California and Texas. Also, most participants reside in their home states for considerable periods of time. Therefore, including a special sample of migrant children in ongoing national data collection efforts is feasible and would provide some outcome information.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Secretary of Health and Human Services examine the advisability of expanding the types of activities included in MHS's definition of agricultural work to harmonize with those that are

considered agricultural work under MEP. In undertaking this examination, the Secretary should consider the resource implications of broadening this definition.

We recommend that to improve services to children, the Secretaries of Education and HHS both develop nationwide systems to transmit essential information about each participant, Education's system to track MEP participants from school district to school district and HHS's system to track MHS participants from center to center.

Because government agencies need to provide a clear picture of how their programs are working, we recommend that the Secretaries of Education and HHS include in their respective research and evaluation plans studies that measure the outcomes of MEP and MHS and the extent to which the programs are meeting their goals.

Agency Comments

We provided copies of a draft of this report to Education and HHS for review. Both responded with comments, reprinted in appendixes VII and VIII. Education in its response generally agreed with our facts and most of our conclusions and recommendations.

Regarding our recommendation about record transfer, Education was concerned that the recommendation might be read to imply that it should design a single new system and not build on existing systems, although, as Education noted, we discussed building on past experience as one way to design a national information transfer system. We did not intend that the system necessarily be a single new system.

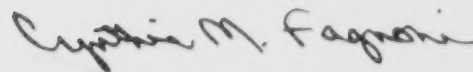
Regarding our recommendation on outcome information, Education said that it would help if we had put more emphasis on the efforts Education has undertaken to obtain better outcome data on migrant children and that the proposed use of NAEP would not overcome the limitations associated with measuring the outcomes of a specific program. In our report, we discussed both Education's plan to use the disaggregated results of state assessments by the year 2000-01 and our concerns about the likely limitations of these data. We believe that the advantages of using NAEP to obtain a common matrix to measure and track the overall educational progress of migrant children on a national level far outweigh any theoretical benefits that might be obtained by limiting measures to those attributable to any particular program.

Education also listed technical comments that we included where appropriate.

In its comments, HHS wrote that this report will help as the Department continues its efforts to change and improve the MHS program. HHS concurred with our recommendation on examining the advisability of expanding the types of activities included in MHS's definition of agricultural work to harmonize with those that are considered agricultural work under MEP. In addition, ACF agreed to explore various options for developing a nationwide information transfer system. ACF also indicated its intent to include outcome measures in its monitoring of MHS through the Head Start program. It believes its current set of outcome measures will be appropriate for use by MHS, although, as we noted in the report, its major outcome study excludes samples of migrant children.

As we arranged with your offices, unless you publicly announce the report's contents earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days after the date of this letter. We will then send copies to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Education, and others who are interested. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

Please contact me or Eleanor L. Johnson, Assistant Director, on 202-512-7215 if you have any questions about this report. Other major contributors were Carolyn S. Blocker, Sonya M. Harmeyer, and Kathleen D. White.



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Abbreviations

ACF	Administration for Children and Families
FACES	Family and Child Experiences Survey
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
MEP	Migrant Education Program
MHS	Migrant Head Start
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress

Migrant Education Services Provided Frequently at Eight Sites

Site	Term	Location			Time			
		Home	School	Other	Before or after school	During school	Evening	Saturday
Santa Rosa, Calif.	Regular	E	E,S	E,S	E,S	E	S	E,S
	Summer	E	E,S	E,S		E,S	S	S
Adams County, Colo.	Regular	E	E,S	S	E,S	E,S	S	E
	Summer	E	E,S	S		E, S	S	
Gainesville, Ga.	Regular		E,S	S		E,S	S	
	Summer	E	E,S			E,S		
Alma, Mich.	Regular		E,S	S		E,S	S	
	Summer	E,S	E,S	E,S		E,S	S	
Oneonta, N.Y.	Regular	E,S	E,S		E,S	E,S		E,S
	Summer	E,S	E	S		E	S	S
Hillsboro, Oreg.	Regular		E,S		E,S	E,S	E,S	
	Summer		E,S	S	E,S	E	S	
Gettysburg, Pa.	Regular	E,S	E,S	S	E,S		E,S	E,S
	Summer	E,S	E,S	S		E,S	S	S
Weslaco, Tex.	Regular	E	E,S		E,S	E,S	S	E,S
	Summer	E	E,S	S		E,S	S	

Appendix I
Migrant Education Services Provided
Frequently at Eight Sites

Service					
Tutorial ^a	Teacher for bilingual courses	Teacher for English as a second language	Schoolwide programs ^b	Correspondence and distance learning courses	Other
E E,S		E E,S	E	S S	Afternoon tutorial services in schools and an afterschool program in a farmworker housing project
E,S E,S	S E,S	S E,S	E E		Preschool programs for migrant children and dental and medical services for all migrant students
E,S			E		An intake and welcome center to enroll migrant children and to provide family support services
E,S E	E,S	E,S E,S		S S	Work study programs for high school students in the summer day classes
E,S E,S	E,S E,S	E,S E,S		S S	Staff work with parents to publish a newsletter and maintain a food bank for the migrant community
E,S	E,S E,S	E,S E,S	E	S S	Programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and 24-hour accident insurance for all MEP students in the state
E,S E,S		E,S		S S	Special summer school courses such as leadership training for migrant middle school students and work-study programs for high school students
E,S E,S	E,S E	E,S	E,S	S	Enrichment programs for secondary students during summer and summer and evening school tuition

Note: "E" is services for elementary school students, "S" secondary school students. No services were available where cells are blank. Although the programs differed, all provided some common services such as recruitment and outreach, instructional services, and guidance and counseling.

^aIndividualized academic and social service support.

^bMEP funds were pooled with other fundings to support educational improvements for all students.

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Migrant Education Data on Students in Eight States

Characteristic	California	Colorado
Number		
Schools in state ^a	7,989	1,462
Schools that enrolled migrant students	3,318	627
Eligible migrant students	210,220	13,029
Regular term MEP project sites	1,416	176
Summer term MEP project sites	329	33
Intersession project sites	24	0
Multiterm project sites	1,006	0
MEP funding (millions)		
Fiscal year 1998	\$89.1	\$4.4
Fiscal year 1999	103.5	5.4
Ages served in regular term		
0-5	7.5%	17.6%
Grades K-6	55.5	47.9
Grades 7-12	35.9	24.6
Other ^c	1.4	10.0
Ages served in summer term		
0-5	13.0%	23.3%
Grades K-6	55.6	51.0
Grades 7-12	30.2	18.2
Other ^c	1.0	7.3
Ethnicity		
American Indian	0	0.7%
Asian and Pacific Islander	3.3%	0.2
Black	0	0.1
Hispanic	96.3	96.3
White	0.2	2.6
Other	0.3	0
Parent occupations		
Crop work	X	X
Meat and poultry processing	X	X
Fishing	X	
Dairy	X	X
Student information system		
COEstar	X	
New Generation System		X
MIS-2000		
Own system		

Appendix II
Migrant Education Data on Students in
Eight States

Georgia	Michigan	New York	Oregon	Pennsylvania	Texas
1,810	3,486	b	1,293	3,192	6,642
550	675	b	961	399	2,857
14,973	18,446	11,303	26,319	12,549	116,912
19	11	b	385	54	1,519
20	3	b	0	26	375
0	0	b	0	0	11
38	38	b	858	0	759
\$4.5	\$9.4	\$6.8	\$10.9	\$7.5	\$43.8
5.6	11	8	12.4	8.8	51.5
41.2%	1.7%	20.4%	10.7%	20.9%	14.3%
27.1	65.8	39.5	56.9	36.5	45.3
15.2	31.9	15.8	29.3	19.8	34.9
16.7	0.6	24.4	3.3	23.0	5.4
53.0%	18.5%	17.1%	24.1%	20.1%	15.3%
32.4	57.4	40.4	52.3	39.9	54.6
11.4	22.3	17.0	12.5	18.9	28.3
3.2	1.8	25.4	11.1	21.0	1.6
2.4%	0.4%	0.1%	1.4%	0.1%	0.1%
0.1	0.6	0.1	2.3	10.3	0.2
3.1	1.6	4.3	0	1.2	0.5
89.2	93.8	55.7	89.5	83.9	96.9
5.2	3.6	39.8	6.8	4.5	2.4
0	0	0	0	0	0
X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X		X
X	X	X	X	X	X
X					X
		X		X	
	X		X		

(continued)

Appendix II
Migrant Education Data on Students in
Eight States

Characteristic	California	Colorado
State funding formula components		
Number of participants during summer school	X	X
Number of participants during regular school year	X	X
Number of eligible students	X	X
Additional funding for children at risk	X	X

Appendix II
Migrant Education Data on Students in
Eight States

Georgia	Michigan	New York	Oregon	Pennsylvania	Texas
X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	
X	X	X	X	X	X
X		X	X	X	X

Note: In addition to detailing statewide demographic information on migrant children for the academic year 1997-98 in the eight states we visited, the table identifies the student information systems the states used. The table shows that except for Oregon, migrant children attended a relatively larger number of schools in home states (California and Texas) than in receiving states (Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania). Although the states tended to target different age groups for services, in all eight states most participants attended elementary school and services were more widely available during the regular term than the summer term.

^aData are reported from the 1997 Database of Schools Enrolling Migrant Children.

^bNew York could not provide data on the number of schools that enrolled migrant children or on the number of project sites, but 427 of 705 school districts statewide enrolled migrant children during 1997.

^cOut-of-school youths and ungraded youths.

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Migrant Head Start Data on Nine Sites in Eight States

MHS delegate agency/grantee ^a	Location	Annual funding
Agri-business Child Development/East Coast Migrant Head Start (ECMHSP)	Schenectady, N.Y.	\$1,247,834
Central California Migrant Head Start	Modesto, Calif.	13,343,055
E Center Migrant Head Start	Ukiah, Calif.	3,907,200
Family Education Network of Weld County	Greeley, Colo.	1,509,974
Georgia Telamon Migrant Head Start/ECMHSP	Macon, Ga.	2,331,971
Michigan Telamon Migrant Head Start	Lansing, Mich.	6,209,275
Oregon Child Development Coalition	Wilsonville, Oreg.	11,121,501
Pennsylvania Rural Opportunities, Inc./ECMHSP	Lemoyne, Pa.	1,144,649
Texas Migrant Council	Laredo, Tex.	29,416,599

Appendix III
Migrant Head Start Data on Nine Sites in
Eight States

Number of centers	Number of children	Dates of operation	Number of hours of operation per day	Ages of children	Information tracking system	
					HSFIS	Other
10	457	Year-round	9-11	6 weeks-5 years	No	Yes
50	2,427	Mar.-Dec.	12	0-5 years	No	No
9	472	May-Nov.	12-14	3 months-5 years	Limited ^b	No
9	208	June-Sept.	12	0-5 years	Limited ^b	Yes
3	381	Apr.-Dec.	11	0-5 years	No	Yes
12	1,279	June-Nov.	8-12	2 weeks-5 years	Limited ^b	Yes
14	1,864	Mar.-Dec.	8-10	6 weeks-5 years	Limited ^b	No
4	190	Jan.-Mar. and Aug.-Dec.	10-12	0-5 years	No	Yes
55	4,529	Year-round	8-10	0-5 years	Limited ^b	No

Note: Data are for 1998 but were reported in fiscal year, calendar year, or school year.

^aHead Start distributes its program funds through grantees. A delegate agency is a public or a private nonprofit or for-profit organization or agency to which a grantee has delegated all or part of the responsibility for operating a Head Start program. Where grantees operated MHS programs, the table gives the grantee only. Where grantees delegated responsibility, the table gives the delegate agency followed by the grantee.

^bThis grantee is not able to electronically exchange information across grantees because the Head Start Family Information System (HSFIS) has not been fully implemented.

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Four Types of Education Information Exchange

Project	Type*	Description	Participants
On student records			
New Generation System	Consortium	Functions as a record transfer and a tracking system that provides on-line records of a student's educational progress and health records and various management reports. Participants have rights to query, add, and update records on students, enrollments, assessments, special needs, and health information. Direct access is usually available on a state or regional level.	Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin
Migrant Student Network	Commercial	Functions as a record transfer and tracking system. Scheduled to stop operations on December 31, 1999.	Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, and South Carolina
MIS-2000	Commercial	Functions as an intrastate database, maintains information on individual students, and can be tailored to needs of a user.	Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, South Dakota, and Tennessee
Red Bag	Consortium	Provides parents of migrant children from Texas a red tote bag that contains a copy of the student's health and school records that the parents carry to each school as they move.	Arkansas, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, and Texas
On curriculums			
Anchor School	MEP technology grant	Provides helpline, voice mail system, portable local network, Internet access, and interactive CD-ROMs.	Students who live in two counties in Florida whose parents migrate along the East Coast
Consortium Arrangement to Facilitate Migrant Student Achievement	Consortium	Formed to develop and share procedures to quickly assess students' academic needs.	Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Utah
Estrella	Consortium, MEP technology grant	Provides 150 migrant students from Texas with laptop computers and modems to enable them to complete coursework needed for high school graduation. Also provides teacher training.	Illinois, Montana, New York, and Texas
Migrant Education Consortium for Higher Achievement (MECHA)	Consortium, MEP technology grant	Provides instructional television used for supplemental tutoring.	Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia
NovaNet	Commercial	Provides a computer-based, on-line learning system for instruction in more than 100 subject areas for middle school, high school, and adult learners.	Multiple
Portable Assisted Study Sequence Program (PASS)	State	Consists of a year-round curriculum in the form of correspondence courses that allow students to work semi-independently to complete coursework to help meet graduation requirements.	Used by sites in 31 states

(continued)

**Appendix IV
Four Types of Education Information
Exchange**

Project	Type^a	Description	Participants
Summer Migrants Access Resources Through Technology (SMART)	Consortium	Consists of a national distance learning program that uses television to transmit lessons aligned with Texas' curriculum for 8 weeks over the summer to help Texas students who temporarily live in other states earn credits for graduation	Arkansas, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia
Out-of-state TASS Testing Assistance	Consortium	Provides out-of-state test preparation and administration to enable students to pass assessments required by Texas for promotion and graduation	Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia
University of Texas Migrant Student Program	State	Offers 22 print-based correspondence courses and 2 computer-based courses to about 145 students a year	Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin
On identification and recruitment			
Consortium Arrangement for Identification and Recruitment (CAIR)	Consortium	Originally formed to develop and enhance identification and recruitment procedures and programs; expanded to develop practices for serving migrant preschoolers and secondary school-aged youths and to address the needs of families through collaborative partnerships with agribusiness	Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming
States Having Arrangements for Resources and Education (SHARE)	Consortium	Develops and shares techniques in recruitment, advocacy, health care, and secondary student leadership and serves youths traveling without families	Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma
Between Mexico and the United States			
Binational Migrant Education Program	International	Conducts teacher exchanges, encourages the transfer of school records, distributes Mexican textbooks to U.S. public schools, and promotes other activities designed to improve cooperation	A joint effort between the United States and Mexico; states and districts participate at their discretion
Colorado/Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico Teacher Exchange	Incentive grant	Two teachers from Colorado participated in a weeklong exchange program with teachers in Mexico	Colorado, Mexico
Oregon Migrant Technology System Grant	MEP technology grant	Provides services through a homework hotline, on-line access to instructional materials, a coordinated Oregonian-Mexican curriculum, and televised bilingual instruction	Oregon, Mexico

^aThe states can use regular MEP funds for commercial and state-sponsored projects aimed at improving educational coordination; the Department of Education also provides incentive and technology grants. Education awards incentive grants to states to encourage them to join multistate consortia that support coordination efforts and to reduce MEP's administrative costs so that more funds can be spent on direct services. In fiscal year 1999, 36 states—members of 12 consortia—received incentive grants ranging from \$31,944 to \$95,832. These funds supported a variety of activities, including teacher exchange programs, career development retreats for migrant students, and software purchases. Education awards competitive technology grants to states or consortia that use technology to help migrant students overcome problems associated with interstate and intrastate mobility. In 1998, Education awarded grants for five technology projects, each funded at about \$400,000 to \$600,000, four of which supported interstate efforts.

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Migrant Education Information Sources and Studies

Source	Description	Samples or focuses on migrant children	Strength	Weakness	Outcome measures
Program information					
State Title I Migrant Participation Information	Contains a descriptive summary of national MEP participation and staffing counts and individual state profiles.	Yes	• Contains state-by-state profiles. • Reports a variety of data. • Provides national as well as state information. • Reported annually. • Will be used to evaluate compliance with the Results Act.	• National data include duplicated counts. • Provides only input and output information. • Data on services are percentages, not numbers of children. • Has no common definition of service.	No
Monitoring					
Integrated Reviews of ESEA and Goals 2000 Formula Programs	Examines the implementation of federal education programs as a coherent set of funding efforts that link with one another and support state and local reform efforts. Generally replaces separate program-specific reviews.	Yes	• Consolidates formerly separate reviews into a coherent review. • Reviews states on a 3-year cycle.	Coverage of MEP is limited.	No
Current or ongoing					
Living in Interesting Times: Early State Implementation of New Federal Education Laws (Oct. 1998)	Analyzed how state officials initially responded to new legislative mandates related to various programs, including title I.	Yes	• Includes data on MEP administration and implementation. • Will be used to evaluate compliance with the Results Act.	Coverage of MEP is limited.	No
Meeting the Needs of Migrant Students in Schoolwide Programs (Jan. 1999)	Examined, from a nationally representative sample of schoolwide projects that have migrant students, how the students were served in title I schoolwide programs.	Yes	• Focused on examining whether migrant children were actually being served in schoolwide programs. • Will be used to evaluate compliance with the Results Act.	Significant data gaps on migrant students make it difficult to determine the extent to which schoolwide programs are actually meeting needs of migrant children as a group.	No
Common Core of Data	Provides basic statistics on K-12 education in the United States. Consists of five surveys completed annually to report data on public elementary and secondary schools, local education agencies, and state education agencies. Includes demographic data on students and dropouts as well as staff and fiscal information.	No	Reports basic information collected on an annual cycle.	Includes no migrant sample.	No

(continued)

**Appendix V
Migrant Education Information Sources and
Studies**

Source	Description	Samples or focuses on migrant children	Strength	Weakness	Outcome measures
Database of Schools Enrolling Migrant Children	Provides summary statistics of public and private schools that enroll migrant children.	Yes	Provides first-time available information to federal and state policymakers on schools enrolling migrant children.	Contains a number of data weaknesses because not all states reported consistent information.	No
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the "Nation's Report Card"	Continuously monitors the knowledge, skills, and performance of the nation's children and youths in such subjects as reading, mathematics, science, writing, and geography.	No	• Encourages schools to include students with limited English proficiency in sample. • Includes an ongoing national study of students' educational progress in basic curricular areas in grades 4, 8, and 12. • Most students with limited English proficiency participate but with accommodation.	Includes no migrant sample.	Yes
State Education Indicators With a Focus on Title I (Council of Chief State School Officers)	Provides a basic picture of characteristics of each state—finances, population demographics, and sources of funding—that affect how public K-12 schools operate.	Yes	• Includes a wide range of data by subject and demographics. • Where available, breaks out data on migrant students. • Will be used to evaluate compliance with the Results Act.	Does not show number of migrant students who were tested; reports only percentages.	Yes
In-process					
Fast Response Survey System's (FRSS) 1998 Survey of MEP Summer School Providers	Designed to collect issue-oriented data quickly and with minimum response burden. Data are representative at the national level, drawing from a universe that is appropriate for each study.	Yes	• Is a good effort to develop a picture of MEP summer school programs. • Will be used to evaluate compliance with the Results Act.	Replication not scheduled.	No
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K)	Provides detailed information on children's early school experiences. The main study began in the fall of 1998 with a nationally representative sample of 23,000 kindergartners from 1,000 kindergarten programs. The children will be followed longitudinally through the fifth grade.	No	• Longitudinal. • Includes representative samples of kindergarten children from a wide variety of public and private schools and from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.	Includes no migrant sample.	Yes

(continued)

Appendix V
Migrant Education Information Sources and
Studies

Source	Description	Samples or focuses on migrant children	Strength	Weakness	Outcome measures
Prospects: The Congressionally Mandated Study of Educational Growth and Opportunity	Consists of a longitudinal study of the effects of title I on students in low-income schools, including effects on students with limited English proficiency. It focused on children attending schools with a high concentration of poor children, characteristics of students who received title I or other compensatory services, and students' educational environment, including coordination of title I services within a school.	No	Provides input, output, and outcome information on children in title I schools.	Includes no migrant sample.	Yes
Future					
Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)	Is an integrated survey of public and private schools, school districts, and principals and teachers. Provides data on staffing and service providers.	Yes	Will include some questions on migrant children on teacher and administrator surveys beginning with next survey.	Contains limited student information because its purpose is to collect information on characteristics of schools and staff.	No
National Longitudinal Survey of School Implementation of Standards-Based Reform and Title I Supports for Reform (NLSS)	Examines how schools are implementing standards-driven improvements, with a focus on title I provisions that support such improvements. Provides data on schools with high proportions of at-risk students, including migrant students.	Yes	Provides information on the number and location of schools that provide regular school year and summer programs for migrant students.	Was conducted in the fall of 1998 and will be conducted again in the fall of 1999 and 2000.	No
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)	Is a longitudinal survey that will provide detailed information on children's development, health, early care, and education from a nationally representative sample of 15,000 children born in 2000 who will be followed from birth through the end of first grade.	No	• Longitudinal. • Includes representative samples from diverse racial-ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.	Includes no migrant sample.	Yes

(continued)

Appendix V
Migrant Education Information Sources and
Studies

Source	Description	Samples or focuses on migrant children	Strength	Weakness	Outcome measures
Descriptive Study of the Chapter 1 Migrant Education Program (1992)	Developed a description of MEP that was current and nationally representative in terms of the characteristics of the students served, program staffing, and state and local practices for targeting services, program administration, program services, and program expenditures.	Yes	Provided information suggesting that migrant children might not receive services from federal educational programs they were eligible for.	No replication is planned.	No

Note: Describes the information the Department of Education collects from program operations, monitoring, special studies, and longitudinal surveys.

Head Start Information Sources and Studies

Source	Description	Includes migrant children	Strength	Weakness	Outcome measures
Program information					
Program Information Report	Collects annual program data from grantees.	Yes	Collects a wide range of program data annually.	• Does not address uniqueness of migrant program. • Data are estimated for some grantees because reporting deadline is at the height of the MHS program. • Not all grantees submit data.	No
Monitoring					
3-year site visit monitoring	Monitors all Head Start grantees every 3 years.	Yes	• Conducts thorough review on-site. • Based on standards. • Completed every 3 years.	Changes emphasis because the instrument is subjective.	No
Current or ongoing					
Bilingual Study	Surveys almost 2,000 Head Start grantees and delegates on bilingual education.	No	• Provides information on special population. • Includes Hispanic children.	Had not been released by October 1999.	No
Study of the Characteristics of Families Served by Migrant Head Start	Consists of a national MHS descriptive study that will illustrate the characteristics of MHS families and programs by interviewing 1,000 parents and staff at 81 MHS centers.	Yes	• Contains new types of data on families. • Focuses on MHS children.	Had not been released by October 1999.	No
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) ^a	Provides detailed information on children's early school experiences. The main study began in fall 1998 with a nationally representative sample of 23,000 kindergartners from 1,000 kindergarten programs. The children will be followed longitudinally through the fifth grade.	No	• Longitudinal. • Includes representative samples of kindergarten children from a wide variety of public and private schools and from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.	Includes no migrant sample.	Yes
Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES)	Consists of a nationally representative, longitudinal study of families with children enrolled in 40 regular Head Start programs.	No	• Longitudinal. • Analysts can infer conclusions from sampled population.	• Uses Program Information Report as source of sample population. • Includes no migrant sample.	Yes

(continued)

Appendix VI
Head Start Information Sources and Studies

Source	Description	Includes migrant children	Strength	Weakness	Outcome measures
National Agricultural Workers Survey ^a	The survey samples crop farmworkers in three cycles each year to capture demographic data such as household and family composition, employment history, wages, benefits and working conditions, income and assets, social services, and legal status.	No	• Focuses on agricultural crop workers. • Constitutes the best available data on cropworkers.	Includes small sample size and complex sampling design.	No
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care	A three-phase, longitudinal study that focuses on 1,364 infants' family, school, neighborhood, and after-school environment as well as ethnic and peer culture and electronic technology.	No	• Longitudinal • Includes data on children up to 3 years old	Includes only English-speaking mothers.	Yes
Future					
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort ^a	Consists of a longitudinal survey that will provide detailed information on children's development, health, early care, and education on a nationally representative sample of 15,000 children born in 2000 who will be followed from birth through the end of first grade.	No	• Longitudinal • Focuses on children up to 3 years old	Includes no migrant sample.	No
Seasonal Farmworker Study	Currently in design, this study will provide estimates of the number of eligible migrant children being served by Head Start agencies.	Yes	Will provide a comprehensive profile of served and unserved migrant and seasonal farmworker children.	Uses databases that are problematic (National Agricultural Workers Survey, Migrant Student Record Transfer System, and Program Information Report).	No

Note: Describes the information that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) collects from program operations, monitoring, special studies, and longitudinal surveys, all of which HHS funds, unless noted otherwise. The criteria for including studies and surveys was that they are national studies and that they include data on migrants, Latinos, farmworkers, or children younger than 3 years old or that they contain longitudinal data.

^aThe Department of Education funds this study.

^aThe Department of Labor funds and conducts this survey.

Comments From the Department of Education



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Cindy Fagnoni
Director,
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
Health, Education, and Human Services Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

SEP 27

Dear Ms. Fagnoni:

Now GAO/HEHS-00-4

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft GAO report, "Migrant Children: Improvements Needed in Program Information and Coordination" (GAO/HEHS-99-183). In this report, you review the Migrant Education Program (MEP) administered by my office and make several recommendations for its improvement.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

While we appreciate the recommendations regarding the MEP, and in general accept them, we wish to note the following points regarding:

Now on page 26.

Records Transfer

You recommend on page 38 that "the Secretary of Education develop a national student information transfer system." We are concerned that this recommendation may be read to imply that a single national system is essential. The Department is currently supporting efforts to interconnect the records management systems that State MEPs have already developed using MEP funds. We believe that building on this existing infrastructure, rather than designing a single new system, will promote sustained support among State officials and enable us to coordinate more effectively the transfer of essential educational and health records for migrant children. While we note that the discussion on pages 36-37 suggests building on existing systems, this point is not carried over into the page 38 recommendation.

Now on page 25.

Now on page 26.

Program Outcome Measurement

You recommend on page 38 that ED "measure the outcomes of MEP" either by expanding current evaluation strategies to include migrant children or by designing evaluation strategies especially for migrant children. In particular, you propose the use of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as a mechanism for obtaining outcome information on migrant students.

Now on page 26.

We are concerned that this recommendation ignores efforts the Department has already undertaken to obtain better outcome data on migrant students. While the 1994

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**Appendix VII
Comments From the Department of
Education**

Page 2 -- Ms. Cindy Fagnoni

amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act do not mandate disaggregation of State assessment data until school year 2000-2001, the Department has been encouraging States to disaggregate on migrant status as soon as possible. According to data compiled by the Council of Chief State School Officers, as of 1997-98 eleven States reported State assessment data disaggregated by migrant status. Moreover, the Department's new bill for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act would continue to require this disaggregation.

We are also concerned that, while the report does note (in passing on page 4 and in more detail on pages 29-31) the limitations associated with attempting to isolate the effects of a specific program, the recommendation proposes no way around these limitations. While providing another source of assessment data, the proposed use of NAEP still would not demonstrate the effects of the MEP.

OTHER CONCERNS

Other, more minor concerns about the report are as follows:

- The report generally portrays the MEP as a program for children of workers engaged in agricultural activities. Children of migratory fishers, as well as older youth who are themselves migratory workers (i.e., "emancipated youth"), are also eligible and served.
- On page 9, the report equates "sending" with "home-based" States. A State can be a "sending" State -- with children who arrive from one State, reside there for a time, and then move on to another State -- without being the children's "home-based" State.
- The discussion on page 10 fails to note that State decisions on MEP service delivery are required to take into account a statutory priority to first serve children who experienced school interruption during the regular school year and are at risk of failing to meet State content and performance standards.
- The definition of a migrant child at the beginning of page 12 is imprecise. In particular, it fails to make clear that the children themselves must move across school district lines, on their own if they are workers, or with or to join parents who have made a move in search of temporary or seasonal employment in agriculture or fishing.
- The footnote on page 13 fails to note that State per-pupil expenditures (SPPEs) are also part of the MEP allocation formula.
- In making a point regarding the flexibility States have in providing MEP program services, the report notes, on page 13, that the Colorado MEP reports all eligible migrant children as program participants because it considers its actions to identify

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Appendix VII
Comments From the Department of
Education

Page 3 -- Ms. Cindy Fagnoni

and recruit eligible children into the MEP as a program service. It would be helpful if the report could note, perhaps as a footnote, that Colorado's practice of counting children who only were identified and recruited, but did not receive any other MEP-funded instructional or support service, is contrary to written guidance from the Department as to what constitutes a program participant for purposes of annual performance reporting.

Now on pages 12-13.

- On pages 14-15, the report downplays the importance of summer services as a unique aspect of the program. In 1997-98, all but one of 51 participating States and Outlying Areas operated summer MEP projects. The total number of migrant students participating in the summer was almost 298,000 of the 621,000 served overall.
- The report provides very little discussion of what, how, and why MEP services are provided by the State MEPs. The report would benefit from a more detailed discussion, based on the eight States visited, as to MEP program goals and operations and how decisions are made about the services provided.
- The statement at the bottom of page 20, that "Neither Education nor HHS has done much to coordinate the exchange of participant information," is overstated. At a minimum, the phrase "in the last few years" might be added after the word "much."
- The discussion of interstate coordination on page 21 is somewhat confusing. It says that neither Federal agency does very much to foster coordination, but then it says that significant coordination exists at the State and local level. We believe that much of this State and local coordination is the result of encouragement at the Federal level.
- The footnote at the bottom of page 23 appears to state that national data represent duplicated local counts of children. While the national data reported for the MEP do include duplication across States, the data are unduplicated within States (i.e., a child is counted once by a State, no matter how many local projects he/she is enrolled in within the State).

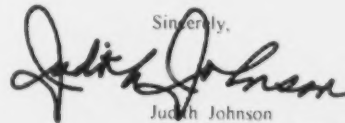
Now on page 16.

Now on pages 18-19.

Now on page 17.

Thank you again for the opportunity to review and comment on your draft report. I hope that you and your colleagues will find our comments useful. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Judith Johnson
Acting Assistant Secretary for
Elementary and Secondary Education

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Comments From the Department of Health and Human Services



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Office of Inspector General

Washington, D.C. 20201

OCT 6 1999

Ms. Cynthia M. Fagnoni
Director, Education, Workforce, and
Income Security Issues
United States General
Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Fagnoni:

Enclosed are the Department's comments on your draft report, "Migrant Children: Improvements Needed in Program Information and Coordination." The comments represent the tentative position of the Department and are subject to reevaluation when the final version of this report is received.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report before its publication.

Sincerely,

June Gibbs Brown
June Gibbs Brown
Inspector General

Enclosure

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is transmitting the Department's response to this draft report in our capacity as the Department's designated focal point and coordinator for General Accounting Office reports. The OIG has not conducted an independent assessment of these comments and therefore expresses no opinion on them.

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Appendix VIII
Comments From the Department of Health
and Human Services

Now GAO/HEHS-00-4

COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ON THE
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S DRAFT REPORT, "MIGRANT CHILDREN
IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN PROGRAM INFORMATION AND COORDINATION"
(GAO/HEHS-99-183)

The Department appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the above-captioned report. This General Accounting Office (GAO) report will be of help to the Department as we continue our efforts to change and improve the Migrant Head Start program so that we can be sure we are being responsive to the changing needs of agricultural workers and are doing the best job we can to meet the needs of many of this Nation's most vulnerable children and families.

The Migrant Head Start program was established almost 30 years ago in recognition of the fact that families who were working outdoors, 10 to 12 hours per day, needed somewhere they could feel comfortable about leaving their children, away from the dangers of farm equipment, pesticides and inclement weather. Since that time Migrant Head Start programs have provided high quality, comprehensive Head Start services to hundreds of thousands of migrant children and families. Recently, in recognition of the changing patterns of where farm families live, the Migrant Head Start program has broadened its scope to also serve the children of seasonal farmworkers so that these families can also have a safe and nurturing environment where they can leave their children while working in the fields. We have seen the Migrant Head Start program grow from a funding level of less than \$88 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 1992 to \$174 million in FY 1999 and we look forward to seeing even greater growth in the next several years as we strive to help meet the needs of those families who are, as the GAO report notes, critical to the continued success of this Nation's agricultural system.

Following are specific comments on the recommendations in the GAO report:

GAO Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of Health and Human Services examine the advisability of expanding the types of activities included in MHS' definition of agricultural work to harmonize with those that are considered agricultural work under MEP. As part of this examination, we recommend that the Secretary assess how broadening the definition would benefit some agricultural families who work in areas other than crops against the potential loss of benefits to some crop worker families.

Department Comment

The Department will review its policy regarding the types of agricultural work currently included in deciding eligibility for the Migrant Head Start program to see if that policy should be revised. This review will include an assessment of how broadening the definition would benefit families who work in areas other than crops against the potential loss of benefits to some crop worker families.

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**Appendix VIII
Comments From the Department of Health
and Human Services**

GAO Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of Health and Human Services assure that a nationwide information transfer system that will allow the exchange of essential information among MHS centers is developed

Department Comment

The Department's Administration for Children and Families (ACF) will explore various options, including the development of a nationwide information system, for improving the exchange of child and family data among Migrant Head Start programs

GAO Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services include in their respective research and evaluation plans studies that measure the outcomes of MEP and MHS, either by expanding current evaluation strategies to include migrant children or by designing evaluations specifically for migrant children

Department Comment

Migrant Head Start programs were excluded from current research efforts on Head Start outcomes solely because of technical issues. The ACF believes that its current and planned set of outcome measures will be appropriate for use by Migrant Head Start programs. These measures will be fully developed and integrated into Head Start's monitoring system by the beginning of Fiscal Year 2001

Other comments on this report are as follows

The Department appreciates GAO's suggestion on inter-departmental coordination and will continue to work with the Department of Education, through task forces and other means, to assure that both departments are keeping each other fully informed on plans to better serve migrant farm workers and their families

The ACF will assure that all migrant grantees submit the Program Information Report each year to be sure we have current data on program services for all enrolled migrant children and families

The ACF will continue to work with migrant grantees to improve their record keeping systems, through use of the Head Start Family Information System and other systems, as appropriate

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